1: Rosen E-5 (1901-1902) 1924 SK6 Choroti SK6

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Fig. 180. Husband and wife, with baby. Choroti. Gran Chaco. Bolivia. Photo. E. v. R.

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supernatural, of some kind or other, plays a leading part when children kill their aged parent.

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Every village is ruled by a chief or headman. According to the observations of some investigators, these headmen do not nowadays possess any great power or authority, but among the Choroti whom I visited in 1901, the chief's authority was by no means inconsiderable. For example, it only needed my arranging with him that the Indians were to carry out a certain piece of work, and the work would be done. For the work performed by the Indians I paid the chief in goods, which he allotted among them as he himself thought fit, as it appeared. In war, each village contingent is under the leadership of their headman. It was stated by the soldiers of Fort Crevaux that all Choroti used to be under a paramount chief, whose authority over all the other chiefs principally consisted in his being entitled to taking chief command in war. The office of village headman as a rule descends from father to son.

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That certain Choroti chiefs used to be held in greater respect than others was made evident to us at a visit we made to a sugar plantation on our return journey to Salta. A large number of Choroti had just then

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7
Toba SI12
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SOCIAL LIFE

CHAPTER III.

M T C 619

Social organization. Chiefs.

The social organization among all tribes of the Pilcomayo is fundamentally the same, although the Tobas represent a more highly developed type of society than the Choroti, Mataco, and Ashluslay. Among all of them the »tribe» is a fairly loose social unit, being simply composed by families related to one another by blood. A clan organization in the strict sense of the word does not exist among the Chaco Indians [1]) and totemism is entirely unknown, although the beginnings of a totemistic system may be traced among the Tobas. The appellation »Ostrich-men» given to the Tobas by some of their neighbours, and certain ideas held of this bird by the Indians themselves undoubtedly point in this direction. C 619 As to the *Choroti*, I have already mentioned that they are split up into three principal sub-tribes, each occupying a special territory within the tract which these Indians regard as belonging exclusively to themselves. Although the different sub-tribes feel themselves, in a general way, parts of the same tribal unit, the Choroti people (*Jóhuaha*), there is not much communication between them and, as I have stated before, the relation between the Choroti of the Pilcomayo and the Choroti living in the interior is almost one of antagonism. Within the sub-tribes, again, the feeling of blood-relationship is strong. Such a sub-tribe consists of a number of village communities, each composed of a few families closely related to one another. As a rule each village has its C 622 chief, *anitsiás*, and over the whole sub-tribe there is even a »great chief»,

[1]) When in the following pages I sometimes use the word »clan», this term has merely reference to the »sub-tribes», by which I simply mean a number of families recognizing consanguinity. The chief reason why the »sub-tribes» of the Chaco Indians cannot be called »clans» proper is that they are not exogamous.

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2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco SI7

Choroti SK6

anélsiäs vuh, exerting a certain social influence. Chieftainship however, among the Choroti is rather nominal than real; even the »great chief» is in fact destitute of power, although in relation to other tribes and to the whites he exercises certain representative functions. Thus when commissions from the sugar factories arrived in the Chaco to negotiate about the sending of Indian labourers to northern Argentine, they had to deal with the chiefs, who through the medium of interpreters gave them answers on behalf of their people. But even the »great chiefs» cannot compel anybody to work, nor can they interfere with the private affairs of the families, in which the father and the mother have full liberty of action. Still more imaginary is the power of the village chief, who is nothing but a *pater familias* enjoying a certain esteem. He cannot command anybody, but merely represents his village community in relation to outsiders, just as the »great chief» represents the whole sub-tribe.

The dignity of chief is not hereditary among the Choroti, nor apparently among the Mataco. When the chief dies, the oldest family fathers of the community assemble under the big algaroba tree which serves as a club-house and elect a new chief, the election taking place in connection with a drinking-feast.

Old men are generally held in great esteem, and the chiefs are generally, although not invariably, men of advanced age. Among the Choroti, old men are held in particular esteem for superstitious reasons, since they are believed to be changed, after death, into evil spirits. As we shall see later on in the chapter on the religion of the Indians, the spirits of the Choroti are believed to appear in the shape of old men. Since the natural magical power of the human body is increased with advancing age, it is natural that old people are feared, but the supernatural halo which surrounds them of course at the same time is apt to give them social influence. Above all their supposed connection with the spirits makes them qualified to exercise religious functions. Independent of any particular initiation, every old man is credited with the power of conjuring the spirits and is thus always more or less a sorcerer. If therefore we wish to speak of a social distinction among the Choroti, we may say that the sorcerers, called *ayïeu*, are the only members of the Choroti society who in a certain sense form a class of their own or mark the beginnings of a social differentiation. Since, however, every old man is more or less expert in the act of magic and considered able to handle the rattle gourd (*pelïte*) or the drum (*usyúk*), the *ayïeu* of the Choroti cannot be called professional sorcerers in the strict sense of the word.

2: Karsten E-5 (1911-1913)1932 SI7 Mataco

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A Choroti settlement in the neighbourhood of Fort Guachalla. Angry dogs are the first to welcome the visitor.

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The old Choroti chief Atamo and his relations.
The scene to the right illustrates the Indian custom of louse eating.